

**Town of Mashpee Board of Selectmen  
Policy 081**

**Public Participation at Public Meetings**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The Mashpee Board of Selectmen welcomes everyone to its meetings and meetings of all other public Town boards, committees and commissions. All regular and special meetings of boards, committees and commissions shall be open to the public and shall conform at all times to the Open Meeting Law of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. (See Chapter 30A, Section 20 of Massachusetts General Laws). The public shall be precluded from attending an executive session meeting of a public body for a valid reason pursuant to MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21. (Meeting of public body in executive session). All comments made by the public are encouraged to be civil and respectful.

**II. AUTHORITY OF CHAIR**

No person shall address a meeting of a public body without permission of the Chair (presiding official), and all persons shall, at the request of the Chair, be silent. No person shall disrupt the proceedings of a meeting of a public body. If a person: 1) Speaks out of order, 2) Expresses obscenities, threats, or inflammatory words, 3) Engages in other disorderly conduct during a meeting, 4) Attempts to engage in dialogue regarding pending litigation or other subject matter inappropriate for a public meeting, or 5) Attempts to address a matter that is not within the public body's scope of authority and responsibility, the Chair shall have the right to rule said person out of order, and, after clear warning from the Chair, the right to order the person to cease and desist such conduct. If notwithstanding such order, a person continues to disrupt the proceedings, the Chair may order the person to withdraw from the meeting, and if the person does not withdraw, the Chair may authorize a constable or other duly authorized officer to remove the person from the meeting. (See Massachusetts General Law Chapter 30A, Section 20, subsection (g)). Notwithstanding the limitations outlined within this section, citizens may offer petitions, presentations, criticism of a policy or practice, or reference any matter of public interest without being considered "out of order", consistent with constitutional free speech principles establishing that a public body does not have the authority to prevent all speech that may be upsetting and/or offensive to others.

**III. PUBLIC HEARING COMMENTS**

If a public hearing is posted within a public meeting, input from the public shall be permitted on the subject matter of the public hearing when the Chair invites public comment on such agenda item. Any person requesting to make a comment should identify themselves and state their address for the record of the proceedings.

**IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS**

If the Chair decides to allow public comment on a specific agenda item, other than comment from a person with a particular interest in the said agenda item, each person shall generally be limited to three (3) minutes or such duration deemed appropriate by the Chair. Any person requesting to make a comment should identify themselves and state their address for the record. Large groups addressing the same topic and offering similar sentiments are encouraged to consolidate their remarks.

## **V. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS**

If the posted agenda for a public meeting includes a “public comments” item, input from the public shall be permitted when the Chair acknowledges said item on the agenda. Members of the public shall sign up or request to speak at the time designated by the Chair. Comments from the public shall generally be limited to three (3) minutes for each individual. Any person requesting to make a comment should identify themselves and state their address for the record. If more than five (5) individuals wish to speak, the public comments may be continued, at the discretion of the Chair, until the next scheduled meeting to assure sufficient time for remaining agenda items. Therefore, the maximum amount of time for public comments is generally fifteen (15) minutes in order to conduct the business of the public body and to satisfy time requirements related to public hearings or other scheduled matters. Public comments may address topics on the agenda or items within the scope of the public body’s authority and responsibility. Large groups addressing the same topic are encouraged to consolidate their remarks.

## **VI. RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Upon closing of a public hearing, further public comments on the subject matter of the hearing shall not be heard. If public comments are allowed by the Chair with respect to a posted agenda item, further discussion may occur. If an individual makes comments during the “public comment” portion of a meeting, the public body will generally not respond to such comments, except under extenuating circumstances and only if the Chair permits. General public comment portions of public meetings are not intended to initiate discussion, debate, or dialogue between and among the public body and an individual on any matter which is not duly posted on the meeting agenda, rather they are intended to provide citizens with an opportunity to express a statement or opinion relating to the business of the public body.

## **VII. REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS**

Any person who wishes to make a public comment before any board, committee or commission and requires accommodations on the basis of a speech-related disability or who requires language interpretation services may be allotted a total of five minutes to present their comments. Speakers should notify the board, committee or commission forty-eight (48) hours in advance by telephone if such arrangements need to be made.

*Adopted by the  
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